



OPERATIONAL WHITEWASH

[Necropolitics](#), [PhiloFiction](#) / 2023-10-22 / [evil](#), [hyper reality](#),
[obscenity](#), [simulation](#), [trans-reality](#), [transparency](#) / Von [Jean](#)

Baudrillard

The uncertainty to which we are subject results, paradoxically, from an excess of positivity, from an ineluctable drop in the level of negativity. A kind of leukaemia has taken hold of our societies – a kind of dissolution of negativity in a perfused euphoria. Neither the French Revolution, nor the philosophy of the Enlightenment, nor critical utopianism has found its fulfilment through the supersession of contradictions, and if the problems they addressed have been solved, this has been achieved by casting off the negative, by disseminating the energies of everything condemned by society within a simulation entirely given over to positivity and factitiousness, by instituting a definitively transparent state of affairs. Ours is rather like the situation of the man who has lost his shadow: either he has become transparent, and the light passes right through him or, alternatively, he is lit from all angles, overexposed and defenceless against all sources of light. We are similarly exposed on all sides to the glare of technology, images and information, without any way of refracting their rays; and we are doomed in consequence to a whitewashing of all activity – whitewashed social relations, whitewashed bodies, whitewashed memory – in short, to a complete aseptic whiteness. Violence is whitewashed, history is whitewashed, all as part of a vast enterprise of cosmetic surgery at whose completion nothing will be left but a society for which, and individuals for whom, all violence, all negativity, are strictly forbidden. In these circumstances everything which is unable to relinquish its own identity is inevitably plunged into a realm of radical uncertainty and endless simulation.

We are under the sway of a surgical compulsion that seeks to excise negative characteristics and remodel things synthetically into ideal forms. Cosmetic surgery: a face's chance configuration, its beauty or ugliness, its distinctive traits, its negative traits – all these have to be corrected, so as to produce something

more beautiful than beautiful: an ideal face, a *surgical* face. Even one's astrological sign, one's birth sign, can now be revised so as to harmonize star and lifestyle: once a utopian notion, the idea of an Institute of Zodiacal Surgery where a few appropriate manipulations would affiliate you with your chosen sign is now clearly realistic.

Even the sex to which we belong – that small portion of destiny still remaining to us, that minimum of fatality and otherness – will be changeable at will. Not to mention cosmetic surgery as applied to green spaces, to nature in general, to genes, to events, to history (e.g. the French Revolution revised and corrected – given a facelift under the banner of human rights). Everything has to become postsynchronable according to criteria of optimal convenience and compatibility. This inhuman formalization of face, speech, sex, body, will and public opinion is a tendency everywhere in evidence. Every last glimmer of fate and negativity has to be expunged in favour of something resembling the smile of a corpse in a funeral home, in favour of a general redemption of signs. To this end a gigantic campaign of plastic surgery has been undertaken.

Everything has to be sacrificed to the principle that things must have an operational genesis. So far as production is concerned, it is no longer the Earth that produces, or labour that creates wealth (the famous betrothal of Earth and Labour): rather, it is Capital that *makes* the Earth and Labour *produce*. Work is no longer an action, it is an operation. Consumption no longer means the simple enjoyment of goods, it means having (someone) enjoy something – an operation modelled on, and keyed to, the differential range of sign-objects.

Communication is a matter not of speaking but of making people speak. Information involves not knowledge but making people know. The use of the construction 'make' plus infinitive [in French, the auxiliary *faire* plus infinitive

– *Trans .]* indicates that these are operations, not actions. The point in advertising and propaganda is not to believe but to make people believe. ‘Participation’ is not an active or spontaneous social form, because it is always induced by some sort of machinery or machination: it is not acting so much as making people act (an operation resembling animation or similar techniques). These days even *wanting* is mediated by models of the will, by forms of making people want something – by persuasion or dissuasion. Even if such categories as wishing, being able, believing, knowing, acting, desiring and enjoying still retain some meaning, they have all been monopolized, as it were, by a simple auxiliary mode. Everywhere the active verb has given way to the factitive, and actions themselves have less importance than the fact that they

are produced, induced, solicited, media-ized or technicized.

There is to be no knowledge save that which results from having (people) know. No speaking save that which results from having (people) speak – i.e. from an act of communication. No more actions save those which result from an interaction – complete, if possible, with television monitor and built-in feedback. For the thing that characterizes operation, as opposed to action, is precisely that operations are necessarily regulated in the way in which they occur – otherwise, there would be no communication. Speaking – but no communication. Communication is operational or it is nothing. Information is operational or it is nothing.

All our categories have thus entered the age of the factitious: no more wanting – only getting people to want; no more doing – only getting people to do; no more *being worth* something – merely getting something to be worth something (witness advertising in general); no more knowing – only letting know; and, last but not least, not so much enjoying, not so much taking pleasure, as getting people to enjoy, getting people to take pleasure. This is the great problem of the moment:

to take sexual pleasure serves no purpose – we are supposed to *give* sexual pleasure, whether to ourselves or to others. Such pleasure has become an act of communication: I am your guest, you are my guest – we exchange pleasure as part of a performative interactivity. Anyone who seeks gratification without communication is a pig. Do communication machines have orgasms? That is another story – but if we try to imagine orgasmic machines, we can do so only by reference to the model of communication machines. As a matter of fact, such orgasmic machines already exist in the shape of our own bodies – bodies coaxed into coming by the subtlest of cosmetic and pleasure-inducing technologies.

Jogging is another activity in the thrall of the performance principle. To jog is not to run but to make one's body run. Though it is based on the body's informal performance, jogging strives to exhaust and destroy the body. The 'secondary state' induced by the activity corresponds exactly to this second operation, this mechanical derailing of the body. The pleasure (or pain) of jogging has nothing to do either with sport or with the body in its fleshly reality: it is the pleasure not of pure physical exertion but of a dematerialization, of an endless functioning. The body of the jogger is like one of Tinguely's machines: ascesis and ecstasis of the performance principle. Making the body run soon gives way, moreover, to letting the body run: the body is hypnotized by its own performance and goes on running on its own, in the absence of a subject, like a somnambulist and celibate machine. (An analogous machine here is Jarry's *quintuplette*, on which the dead carry on pedalling by them selves.) The interminable aspect of jogging, like the interminable aspect of psychoanalysis, is indeed endless, aimless, illusionless performance.

It can no longer be said that the goal here is 'getting into shape', which was an ideal of the 1960s and 1970s. Fitness then was still functional: it represented a striving for market value, for the body's sign-value, its productivity or status.

Performance, by contrast, is operational: it is orientated not towards the body's form but towards its formula – its equation, its potentiality as a field of operations, as something that we cause to function because, just like any machine, it asks to be activated; because, just like any signal, it asks to be switched on. It is just as simple as that. Hence the deep vacuousness of the action's content. What could be vainer than all this running for the sake of exercising the faculty of running? And still they run . . .

The same indifference to content, the same obsessional and operational, performative and interminable aspects, also characterize the present-day use of computers: people no more think at a computer than they run when jogging. They have their brain function in the first activity much as they have their body run in the second. Here too the operation is virtually endless: a head-to-head confrontation with a computer has no more reason to come to an end than the physical effort that jogging demands. And the kind of hypnotic pleasure involved, the ecstatic absorption or resorption of energy – bodily energy in one case, cerebral in the other – is identical. On the one hand, the static electricity of skin and muscles – on the other, the static electricity of the screen.

Jogging and working at a computer may be looked upon as drugs, as narcotics, to the extent that all drugs are directly governed by the dominant performance principle: they get us to take pleasure, get us to dream, get us to feel. Drugs are not artificial in the sense of inducing a secondary state distinct from a natural state of the body; they are artificial, however, in that they constitute a chemical prosthesis, a mental surgery of performance, a plastic surgery of perception.

It is hardly surprising that the suspicion of systematic drug use hangs over sport today. Different forms of obeisance to the performance principle can easily set up house together. Not only muscles and nerves but also neurons and cells must be

made to perform. (Even bacteria will soon have an operational role.) Throwing, running, swimming and jumping have had their day: the point now is to send a satellite called 'the body' into artificial orbit. The athlete's body has become both launcher and satellite; no longer governed by an individual will gauging the effort expended with a view to self-transcendence, it is controlled by an internal microcomputer working by calculation alone.

The compulsion to operationalism gives rise to an operational paradox. It is not just that the order of the day is 'making something worth something': the fact is that it is better, if something is to be invested with value, for it to have no value to begin with; better to know nothing in order to have things known; better to produce nothing in order to have things produced; and better to have nothing to say if one seeks to communicate. All of which is part of the logic of things: as everyone knows, if you want to make people laugh, it is better not to be funny. The implications for communication and information networks are incontestable: in order for content to be conveyed as well and as quickly as possible, that content should come as close as possible to transparency and insignificance. This principle may be seen in action in the telephone relationship or in media transmissions – as also in more serious arenas. Thus *good* communication – the foundation, today, of a *good* society – implies the annihilation of its own content. (Note that even the term 'society' has lost its meaning: the only thing that is still 'social' is whatever can be manufactured as such, as 'sociality' or 'sociability' – ghastly sobriquets which perfectly express the thing to which they refer: such terms – as Francois George has said of 'sexuality' – put one in mind of some form of surgery.) And if good communication implies the annihilation of its own content, good data-handling implies a digital transparency of knowledge. Good advertising implies the nullity – or at least the neutralization – of the product being advertised, just as fashion implies the transparency of women and their

bodies – and just as the exercise of power implies the insignificance of those who exercise it.

What if all advertising were an apologia not for a product but for advertising itself? If information referred not to events but to the promotion of information itself *qua* event? If communication were concerned not with messages but instead with the promotion of communication itself *qua* myth?

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Taken from : The Transparency of Evil

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